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SUBJECT: MILITIAS IN KUNDUZ; A TALE OF TWO DISTRICTS

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Coordinator Scott F.
Kilner for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Since Kunduz authorities helped stand up pro-GIRoA militia forces in early Fall 2009, the forces have evolved in very different directions. In Qala-e-Zal district, a well-disciplined force has brought about a marked improvement in security, while the picture in the Aqtash areas of Khanabad district is much less positive because the GIRoA clearly lacks adequate control over the fighters. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (C) In June 2009, Kunduz Governor Mohammad Omar announced the creation of an Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) in Kunduz province, for which 150 to 200 men were to be recruited in each district to complement regular ANP. In July, Gov. Omar and provincial security officials conducted shuras throughout the province, in which elders and former mujahedeen commanders were asked to identify suitable recruits for the force. Omar subsequently learned, however, that APPF would not be expanded to Kunduz province and increasingly frustrated with a shortage of ANSF, especially ANP, Kunduz authorities moved to stand up militia forces which would work with the ANSF to combat the growing insurgency. Funding for the initiative was obtained primarily through the National Directorate of Security (NDS). QAL-E-ZAL: A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY- BASED SECURITY

¶3. (C) In the northwestern district of Qala-e-Zal, militia forces under the command of Nabi Gichi have been the most organized and disciplined of the various militia groups operating in Kunduz province. A large part of the credit for this must go to District Manager Mohammad Nazir, who was involved from the beginning in the standing up of a pro-GIRoA militia and recruiting for its leader, the Turkmen former mujahedeen commander Nabi Gichi from Mazar-e-Sharif. The commanders received some weapons as well as funding from the NDS to supplement to supplement their own weapons, and community elders agreed to provide some food for the militia members. The commanders submitted to Nabi as the overall commander in the district, and they promised not to collect taxes from or harass the population. According to Nazir, each sub-commander of Nabi is responsible for a certain area, and those forces are not permitted to operate outside of the area. In the event of a security incident or allegations of misconduct by militia members, Nazir told us, he holds the sub-commander of the area personally responsible.

¶4. (C) Nabi's forces proved themselves in fighting insurgents in September, at a time when insurgents appeared close to taking over much of Kunduz province. Together with ANSF, his forces successfully fended off an insurgent attack on a border police post in Qala-e-Zal, along the border with Tajikistan, and have successfully driven insurgents from much of Qala-e-Zal district. During a visit by PRT Kunduz in

November to the district to assess the situation and explore opportunities for quick-impact projects, Nabi's forces were present, yet both the commander himself and his forces (identifiable by their wearing of a yellow armband) remained discreetly in the background and visibly deferential to the District Manager. The local population expressed strong appreciation for the improvement in security Nabi's forces have brought.

KHANABAD: GIROA HAS LITTLE CONTROL

15. (C) In Khanabad district in eastern Kunduz province, particularly in the Aqtash area, militias have also been active, but the picture is altogether different from that in Qala-e-Zal. While in Qala-e-Zal a commander was recruited from outside the area, the move to support militias in Khanabad district has significantly increased the influence of local power brokers from the area. The most powerful of the militia leaders in Khanabad are Mohammad Omar (unrelated to the Kunduz Governor of the same name), an ethnic Pashtun; and Mir Alam Khan, a Tajik commander and the most powerful power broker in the province. Mir Alam is also the brother-in-law of Kunduz NDS Chief Gen. Mohammad Daoud. While the full extent of the cooperation between NDS and Mir Alam is not clear, it is likely that Mir Alam's relationship to Gen. Daoud has given him a privileged position in receiving NDS support.

16. (C) The most problematic aspect of developments in Khanabad district is the lack of adequate GIROA control over the forces operating in the area, an issue over which both KABUL 00000012 002 OF 002 District Manager Nezamuddin Nasher and Kunduz Deputy NDS Chief Karim Atrafi have repeatedly expressed concern. In Atrafi's assessment, unlike in Qala-e-Zal, the situation in Aqtash has become quite confused, and neither NDS nor other GIROA authorities have much control over the situation. According to Atrafi, the fighters active in Aqtash do not have a clear chain of command, and these militia forces are also fighting among themselves and settling old scores. Atrafi also noted that some groupings were cooperating with both insurgents and GIROA, changing their behavior opportunistically depending on their own interests.

17. (C) Already, there are indications that the situation in Aqtash, which militia forces cleared just before the election, is quite fragile, and reports from the area suggest there is significant resentment among the local population toward the militias' practices of collecting taxes. Further complicating the picture is the complex ethnic makeup of Khanabad district. Unlike in Qala-e-Zal, where the population is overwhelmingly Turkmen, Khanabad district, like the province as a whole, comprises a plurality of Pashtuns as well as smaller numbers of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. As the militias loyal to Mir Alam are mostly Tajiks, there exists a real risk that conflict between the population and militias or among the militias themselves will take on an ethnic dimension, in which the militias are perceived by Pashtuns as not anti-Taliban but anti-Pashtun.

18. (C) The very different development in Qala-e-Zal and in Khanabad highlight the significant benefits and risks associated with such informal security mechanisms. In Qala-e-Zal, the militias have undoubtedly been a stabilizing force. The involvement of the District Manager from the start, the inclusion of the community into the process, their benign behavior toward the population (not collecting taxes), and the (comparatively) clear chain of command have all helped to make the force in Qala-e-Zal a success. The picture in Khanabad is much less clear, and it remains to be seen whether the security gains that have been made there will be durable, or if they came at the price of increasing ethnic tensions in the long-term. Furthermore, as Afghan officials increasingly see a need to bring the militia forces into an official framework, these different characteristics among militia groups will have significant implications for any possible future integration of the forces into ANSF. Post will engage with GIROA authorities on the potential for

that integration and will continue to monitor the development of these informal security mechanisms. End Comment.

19. (U) This cable was drafted by PRT Kunduz.
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